

## **Facts About Influenza**

### **What is influenza?**

Influenza (flu), is a very contagious viral infection. Influenza is spread easily from person to person usually when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Influenza may lead to hospitalization or even death, especially among the elderly. An estimated 10% to 20% of the population will get influenza each year. The influenza season usually runs from December through April.

### **What are the symptoms of influenza?**

It's very typical to hear all viral illnesses called "the flu." However, typical influenza comes on suddenly with a high fever, chills, a dry cough, headache, runny nose, sore throat and muscle/joint pain. Unlike other viral illnesses with these symptoms, influenza causes you to be extremely tired for several days to weeks. Many describe influenza as "being hit by a truck."

### **Should I get a flu shot?**

Anyone who wants to keep from getting influenza should get the vaccine, each year. (The virus changes each year, so a new shot is needed.) The best time of year to get the shot is October through mid-November. It's most important for the following people to get the vaccine:

- People 65 years of age or older
- People with chronic diseases of the lungs or heart
- People who are less able to fight infections because of disease, HIV, treatment with certain drugs, or treatment for cancer with x-rays or drugs.
- People with chronic diseases like diabetes mellitus, kidney diseases and blood cell diseases such as sickle cell anemia.
- Women who will be during the second or third trimester of pregnancy during the flu season.
- Residents of nursing homes or other long-term care facilities.
- Teenagers who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy and might be at risk for developing Reye syndrome after influenza.
- Health care workers and others who have contact with people in high-risk groups.

### **Can I get the flu from the influenza vaccine?**

There is no way to get flu from the influenza vaccine. The vaccine uses organisms that have been "killed."

Remember, it takes around two weeks for the body to produce an immune response to the vaccine. If you get exposed before that, you can still become sick. Also, it's not uncommon for people who get the vaccine for the first time to feel achy and tired, afterwards. This usually goes away after a day or two and shouldn't be a problem with future doses.

Also, not everyone gets full protection from the vaccine. However, even if people who get the vaccine get influenza, the illness is usually much milder and will help prevent you from having complications.

***For more information on immunizations, contact the New Hampshire Immunization Program at 1-800-852-3345, extension 4482. You can also e-mail us at [immunization@dhhs.state.nh.us](mailto:immunization@dhhs.state.nh.us).***